

July 17, 2002

Honorable Tommy G. Thompson
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Thompson,

The U.S. Congress and the Bush Administration are both set to significantly increase the U.S. resources committed to the fight against HIV/AIDS globally. We commend the Administration for its decision to make preventing mother-to-child HIV transmission a priority in this effort.

As you know, the U.S. spends more on global HIV/AIDS than any other nation. This year alone, we will spend \$1 billion on global AIDS in addition to the money we will spend on research and development for treatments and vaccines from which the whole world will benefit. To date, the U.S. government has spent more than \$100 billion in combating the epidemic

In addition to treatment, research, prevention efforts, and care, these funds support gatherings of scientists and advocates at conferences, such as the XIV International AIDS Conference held last week in Barcelona.

As the representative of the largest contributor to the global AIDS fight, we were very disappointed by the rude reception which prevented you from addressing this conference. We were also shocked to learn that the Vatican—which cares for one in four people receiving treatment for HIV infection globally-- was uninvited to the conference. None of the major speeches or lectures dealt with faith's role in the crisis. And the Associated Press reports that some of the conference's "seminars and workshops often became 'religion-bashing' sessions."

As you know from your own recent trip to Africa, it's often local churches and religious communities who are caring for orphans and taking care of those dying of AIDS. And the prevention programs which have incorporated religious leaders that promote sexual restraint to youngsters have played a significant part in reducing HIV infection rates in Uganda, Zimbabwe and other nations. Experts widely note that AIDS campaigns will be ignored without church backing in regions such as southern Africa which faces the world's highest HIV infection rates.

Clearly, organized religion is already and must continue to play an important part in the global response to HIV/AIDS.

The religious intolerance and outright disdain expressed by the conference organizers and many of the activists who attended should not be subsidized with U.S.

taxpayer dollars. It is beyond disgraceful that those calling for tolerance and understanding of people living with HIV/AIDS would themselves act with such intolerance and discrimination toward you, the American taxpayers, and the religious institutions that are providing so much to care for those suffering from AIDS.

After all, while HIV/AIDS may not discriminate against people based upon gender or sexual identity, it likewise does not discriminate on the basis of religious or other beliefs and neither should our response or those we work with to address this dreadful pandemic.

We would like to know:

- (1) What was the total amount of U.S. federal assistance—both direct financial support and in kind donations—which went to the XIV International AIDS Conference?
- (2) How many individuals—from both the government and non-government organizations-- attended the conference with some form of federal assistance? Please provide a complete list of these individuals including their affiliations.

Finally, we would request that unless the International AIDS Conference can guarantee the freedom of speech to U.S. representatives and discontinues its discrimination against those of religious faith—in particular the Catholic Church—that the U.S. withhold assistance to future conferences and redirect the funding to helping those living with HIV/AIDS-- either in the U.S. or abroad-- who can not afford treatment.

Sincerely,

Robert Aderholt
Alabama

Joe Pitts
Pennsylvania

Jim DeMint
South Carolina

John Shadegg
Arizona

Jim Ryun
Kansas

John Doolittle
California

Todd Tiahrt
Kansas

Sue Myrick
North Carolina

John Sullivan
Oklahoma

Sam Johnson
Texas

Mark Souder
Indiana

Jo Ann Davis
Virginia